Islamic Jihad issues ultimatum, threatens to kill six Westerners

By Richard N. Beeston
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BEIRUT, Lebanon — The terrorist group Islamic Jihad sent a Beirut newspaper pictures of six abducted Westerners, including four Americans, and issued "for the last time" conditions for their release.

Hours earlier and apparently unrelated, eight gunmen kidnapped a senior Irish U.N. official as he was being driven to work in Beirut's Moslem sector. Their identity was not known and no demands were made for the release of Aidan Walsh, 48, the deputy director of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency.

Notes accompanying the photographs of the six other Westerners did not mention Mr. Walsh.

Delivered to the respected independent west Beirut newspaper An Nahar, the notes also contained appeals to U.S. civil rights activist Jesse Jackson.

"Their release is up to your action to persuade your governments to pressure them to ask their agents in Kuwait to release all our brothers who are jailed there," said a typewritten statement to the men's relatives. "Our brothers" apparently was a reference to three Lebanese Shiites and seven Iraqis jailed in Kuwait for a series of bombings against French and U.S. targets on Dec. 12, 1983.

"For the last time, we warn you... the punishment will be a horrible disaster in case you do not act seriously in this respect and pressure your governments to intervene and set [our brothers] free," the statement said.

An Nahar's editors identified the men staring into a camera as Presbyterian minister Benjamin Weir, U.S. Embassy official William Buckley, Catholic missionary Martin Lawrence Jenco and Associated Press Beirut bureau chief Terry A. Anderson — all Americans — and French diplomats Marcel Fontaine and Marcel Carton. All were kidnapped between March 1984 and March 1985.

No mention was made of a fifth American missing in Lebanon, Peter Kilburn, a 60-year-old librarian at the American University of Beirut.

Mr. Walsh was grabbed in broad daylight near his apartment on a busy road after his station wagon was sandwiched between the two cars of his assailants.

His Palestinian driver, who was allowed to go free, said Mr. Walsh did not resist but was taken at gunpoint into one of the cars, which then disappeared into traffic.

The abduction of Mr. Walsh is the second this year of an UNRWA official. On March 25, Briton Alec Collett, a journalist working for the agency, was kidnapped in similar style on a road only a few miles south of yesterday's abduction by a group called the Revolutionary Organization of Socialist Moslems.

The group has in the past made a number of attacks of Britons living abroad, but Western sources in Beirut said they did not believe the same organization was responsible this time.

"I do not think his nationality has anything to do with it," said an Irish diplomat. "We have a very posititve relationship in Lebanon, and there has never been an Irishman taken here before."

Within moments of the kidnapping being discovered, contacts were made with the various militia leaders in West Beirut to try to secure his release. "We have to work quickly on this," explained one of the people involved in the negotiations. "The longer they hold him, the less likely it is we will get him out."

Negotiators were still waiting for someone to claim responsiblity for the kidnapping and expressing bewilderment for lack of an obvious motive.

One theory for the abduction is that the kidnappers were acting out of criminal rather than political motives. Mr. Walsh is known as a "troubleshooter" brought into Lebanon last September to try to clear up financial irregularities and corruption inside the agency.

The agency administers aid and relief services to Lebanon's 350,000 Palestinian refugees, but funds and aid are thought to have been misappropriated.

This story is based in part on wire-service reports.